

OBITUARY



Kathleen Funder

Born Wonthaggi, Victoria, 19 September 1941
Died Melbourne, 13 June 1998

Dr Kathleen Funder – known to her colleagues as Kate – died on Saturday 13 June 1998 at the age of 56. She was a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, where she had worked since 1983.

Kate was recognised in Australia and internationally for the quality and policy relevance of her research in the field of family studies which was reflected in her many publications and her commitment to scholarship.

Before coming to the Institute, Kate was a teacher and educational psychologist, and she retained an active interest in these fields as a member of the Victorian Psychologists Registration Board, the Research Advisory Committee of the Victorian Association of Family Therapists, and previously as Chair of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Psychological Society, and Chair of the Advisory Committee, Psychology Department, Swinburne University.

During her 15 years with the Institute, Kate played a crucial role in the Institute's research agenda. She was involved in the groundbreaking study into the economic consequences of marriage breakdown in Australia, and she coordinated the follow-up study which monitored the longer-term consequences of divorce and the care arrangements and support for children. More recently, she was Project Manager and Principal Researcher of the Institute's *Family Law Evaluation Project*, and the *Australian Divorce Transition Project*.

Her research at the Institute covered areas significant to family wellbeing, most notably the place of children in society and the adaptations of parents and children to the psychological and economic aftermath of marriage breakdown. She wrote persuasively about the need to forego prejudices against single mothers and the children of separated parents, and was an articulate advocate of children's rights.

There are many publications to her name. She was a key author of *Settling Up: Property and Income Distribution on Divorce in Australia*, which focused on the processes and impacts of matrimonial property division. She was principal author of *Settling Down: Pathways of Parents after Divorce*, which examined the various routes to recovery from divorce. And she was sole author of the third book in this trilogy, *Remaking Families: Adaptation of Parents and Children to Divorce*, which added the voices of the children to the overall picture of post-divorce families.

Two major books on Australian families edited by Kate brought together foremost commentators on family life, children's rights and child policy. *Images of Australian Families* explored the diversity of family forms and lifestyles, and the ways in which children perceive their family. *Citizen Child: Australian Law and Children's Rights* provided a thought-provoking review of law and practice in relation to the place of children in Australian society.

Kate was one of the mainstays of the Institute's journal, *Family Matters*, contributing abundantly on issues relating to family law and children's rights. Her work also appeared in research journals the world over, and in edited collections including *Economic Consequences of Divorce: The International Perspective*, edited by Lenore Weitzman and Mavis Maclean, published by Oxford University Press.

As with her writing, Kate was a compelling speaker with the gift of challenging the intellect and engaging the imagination. She had a love of words and was a sought-after contributor to television and radio programs and newspaper columns. She was invited to speak at conferences around the world, including the International Society for Family Law conferences over the years in Durbin, Brussels,

Yugoslavia and Minneapolis, and conferences hosted by the National Council on Family Relations in the United States, and the Chinese Academy of Social Science in Beijing.

Last year, Kate was a Visiting Fellow at Oxford University during which time she presented papers to the Family Policy Centre in London, and the Departments of Social Policy at Bristol and York Universities.

Her research had direct practical implications and changed the lives of many, not least through her work in the family law area which included her role as observer on the Family Law Council of Australia, and her membership of the Australian Law Reform Commission Reference on Children and the Law. Other professional affiliations included membership of the Committee on Family Research of the International Sociological Association, and the National Council on Family Relations (United States).

Kate was a loyal and conscientious colleague, inspiring in others the interest, initiative and energy which she herself had in abundance.

Kate had style. She was great company, and the breadth and sweep of her conversation, quickened by her perceptive insights and her often irreverent humour, was stimulating and hugely enjoyable. She was a regular early-morning swimmer who would nevertheless arrive early to work, and amid the hair drying and breakfasting on muesli, to the "clunk of the refilling urn" in the staff kitchen, she could hold court in discussing the issues of the day – from complex social concerns, to the foibles of human nature, to travel, books and theatre, to dinners planned, to her cherished family life.

Kate was a spirited woman and a woman of great spirit. This was never more apparent than when her primary cancer was diagnosed in 1990 and required the removal of a kidney. She made the most of every moment, swimming and windsurfing within weeks, and shortly thereafter travelling to Stanford University for six months as a Visiting Scholar.

She was an adventurous traveller, who never allowed her mild dose of flying neurosis to ground her – her unquenchable curiosity about the world won every time! She loved experiencing new cultures and environments, be it camping in the Kimberleys, walking in France, canoeing in Borneo, or exploring the galleries of London and New York. Several stints living in Paris, Oxford and California contributed to her urbanity and allowed her to acquire, to the envy of many, a fluency in Parisian accented French.

Kate was devoted to her husband John, and children Anna, Hugh and Joshua, and she derived great joy and pride in their achievements and adventures. The Funder household was always lively, welcoming and hospitable. Kate's quest for the perfect cup of coffee was matched by her (invariably successful) experiments in the kitchen, which were shared by family friends over the years.

She had many friends and colleagues around the world, and there were constant phone calls and emails expressing concern when news of her illness began to circulate.

Her interest in her work never waned, and even in the last weeks of her life she was still reading drafts and arranging her ongoing research project to be allocated to others.

Kate lived life to the full. As in her approach to life, she faced illness and death with dignity and courage. She died at home surrounded by her family. She is greatly missed.

**Friends and colleagues at the
Australian Institute of Family Studies**